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SALT TALKS: LEAKING TOWARD ARMAGEDDON?

Hawks, Who Once Defended Secrecy, Now Disclosing Details Of Arms Negotiations

Deciding the future of the world in a fishbowl.

BY ROBERT G. KAISER

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks are certainly the most sensitive of international negotiations, yet in the past few months they have also become the most open. In October, a detailed account of the emerging shape of the next SALT agreements appeared in *The New York Times*, as thorough a leak regarding ongoing international negotiations of this kind as has ever been printed. And there have been more leaks since.

There seem to be no precedents for this. The *Times* and *The Washington Post* published SALT leaks during the first Nixon administration, but they contained only isolated pieces of hard information, or generalized statements of Soviet and American bargaining positions. This time we have seen all the key numbers, particularly numbers of different kinds of weapons to be permitted to each side. Nixon sent the Plumbers to track down SALT leaks but, so far, Carter has turned the other cheek.

For spectators of the news business, this episode has been intriguing. A few interested reporters have now become participants in the arcane SALT process. Hawks who once bemoaned leaks have become leakers themselves. Doves have used published leaks to try to undercut the hawks, a reversal of traditional roles.

Because of leaks to the press, the public debate over SALT II—as this round of the negotiations is called—has begun months before any agreement actually can be signed with the Soviet Union.

The Offensive Arms Race

Of all the United States' diplomatic initiatives in recent times, only Kissinger's elaborate efforts to find a negotiated way out of Vietnam match the SALT process in complexity. Lyndon B. Johnson tried unsuccessfully to get SALT going in 1968. Nixon and Kissinger succeeded in 1969. The first treaty was significant primarily because it bound both superpowers to accept a status of mutual vulnerability to the other's strategic weapons. It did this by banning Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM's), at that time the only known possible defense against intercontinental rockets armed with hydrogen weapons. The first SALT agreements also

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Secretary of State Cyrus Vance meets with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei

included an "interim" agreement on offensive weapons, to last five years, limiting both sides to certain numbers of land-based and submarine-based missiles and long-range bombers.

Under SALT I, the Soviet Union was permitted more offensive missiles than the United States, on the theory that American technology—particularly multiple-warhead technology—gave the U.S. an advantage that the Soviets could only compensate for with larger overall numbers of rockets. But when the Senate approved that agreement, it also passed a resolution calling on future SALT negotiators to make sure that the next agreement included equal numbers of offensive missiles on both sides.

SALT I did little, if anything, to slow down the offensive arms